

QUEEN TOPAZ ESCAPES

PACIFIC GROVE'S LEGEND OF THE BLUE WILLOW

Long ago in far off Cathay, a land now called China, there lived during the reign of Emperors a wealthy Mandarin named T'so Ling. His land holdings were vast and fertile, and his treasures beyond counting. His palace was built of fine woods and rich lacquers with a roof of blue tile that gleamed in the sun, and a handmade fence that ran below the palace. Behind the palace grew an orange tree, and beside the palace ran a river with a graceful willow that gave shade in the heat of the day.

Of all T'so Ling's possessions, his beautiful Princess daughters with their jewel names were his greatest joy. Princess Emerald, Princess Turquoise, Princess Tourmaline and Princess Amethyst. The Mandarin delighted most in his eldest daughter, Koong-se, who he named Queen Topaz, so named for the golden lights that danced in her eyes. This means that she is enlightened and the hero of our story. Topaz passed her days in a summerhouse that leaned over the rippling water, where she did elegant embroidery on silk while listening to tales of old Cathay as told by her faithful nurse, Chun Soy.

T'so Ling thought Topaz so lovely that he wished to crown her as Queen. A coronation ceremony was planned, and all the princes, potentates, maharajahs and lords of the realm were invited to attend the coronation. One of the old mandarins named Ta-Jin brought a chest of gold so impressive that T'so Ling thought this rich man would make a fine husband for his daughter Topaz. T'so Ling made plans to combine the coronation with a marriage feast.

Topaz heard this news and became quite despondent, for she had fallen in love with a young scholar named Chang. Hearing of this, T'so Ling forbade his daughter to marry Scholar Chang. Topaz is heartbroken. One day she is kneeling by the water near the summer house when she sees a coconut shell. In the shell is a note from Scholar Chang and she is so excited that she writes to him, asking him to rescue her from the wedding.

Scholar Chang sneaks into the palace on the night of the coronation with the help of the Royal Guard and rescues his beloved. The old nurse discovers the lovers and warns the Mandarin. He chases the young lovers, but they escape. T'so Ling alerted the villagers to search for Topaz and Chang with lighted boats and lanterns. He also orders the great torii gates to be lighted. He wants to find his beautiful daughter Koong-se. All this time the Goddess Guan Yin, has been watching the Topaz and Chang. She is moved by their love. Guan Yin, is "she who hears the cries of the world." She is the Goddess of Compassion. She decides to transform the lovers, so they might be free.

In a final burst of lights, Topaz and Chang are illuminated as they changed into Monarch butterflies and escaped into the sky. The lovers return every year to the place where they fell in love. They are lost in the sea of Monarchs so that the Mandarin may never find them.

The pageant, which takes place on the last night of the Festival, tells the story in pantomime and ends with a burst of fireworks overhead as the lovers are seen for a brief moment departing in the guise of Monarch butterflies. Queen Topaz is free to spend eternity with her chosen beloved Scholar Chang.

